

Geoff and Joanne: United by dance

It is no secret that music and dance have the power to unite people of different cultures and backgrounds.

On Top of the World residents Joanne Zeldenrust and Geoff Caldbrick are two people who happily claim to have fallen under its spell.

Joanne was born in a small town on the border of the Netherlands (Holland) and Belgium. Her mom used to say that when she was born, her feet landed in Belgium and her head landed in Holland. That's because the border quite literally transected the town. In some cases, even individual buildings were bi-national.

Joanne was born Johanna Clasina Maria Theresia van Bommel. The only thing longer than her name is the list of languages that she speaks – Dutch, Flemish, German, French and English.

She and her first husband immigrated to Melville, Saskatchewan, a tiny town in the Canadian prairies in 1955 where she trained as an x-ray technician.

From there they moved to nearby Regina where she worked for a trust company and learned the magic of money management.

Later they moved to Ottawa, the nation's capital, where she was secretary for the Belgian Ambassador. Her interview for the embassy job was conducted in five languages.

After many more household moves, Joanne had added hobby farming and bed-and-breakfast ownership to her expanding resumé.

Geoff was born in Timmins, a forestry and gold mining town in northern Ontario.

After graduating from McGill University in Montreal with a Bachelor of Arts degree, he landed a job as a reporter, desk-man and swing-man for the St. Catharines Standard, a newspaper located near Niagara Falls and the legendary Vineland Summer Theater.

During his reporting years, Geoff interviewed actor Hugh O'Brien, who played Wyatt Earp, and also interviewed Lillian Roth, whose biography, "I'll Cry Tomorrow," was made into a Hollywood movie.

The newspaper's proximity to the theater also put Geoff in contact with celebrities like Mickey Rooney, Lee Marvin and Michael Rennie, who performed there for the summer.

One day, when Geoff was on duty, he and his cameraman were called out to report on a nearby fire. They arrived to find hungry flames consuming



The love of dancing drew Joanne and Geoff together and it is what unites them today. (OTOW News photo by John Koning)

a billboard advertizing the Vineland Theatre's production of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. After capturing and submitting the ironic scene in words and pictures, Geoff's photographer netted a nice sum of money in royalties while Geoff settled for a pat on the back for his efforts.

Geoff left the newspaper business in 1961 to become a teacher and spent the next 28 years teaching at the high school level. During his open evenings he taught English to new Canadians and night school courses. During the

summer break he taught other teachers.

As another sideline, Geoff reviewed text books that were being considered for the Ontario secondary school curriculum. He finished his career as an English Department head with a Masters Degree in Education.

After the passing of Joanne's first husband, the lives of these two dancers merged. Joanne had already taken dance lessons before she met Geoff and she helped him along with his education. Before too long they were

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inseparable on the dance floor and off.

When Joanne took a liking to line dancing, Geoff would have nothing to do with it at first, but Joanne's enthusiasm eventually enticed him to give it a go. Geoff is now firmly entrenched in the line dancing lifestyle, although he still prefers ballroom dances for couples.

Their penchant for dancing has taken Geoff and Joanne far and wide. They have taught dance on cruise ships for Celebrity, Carnival, Costa, Fun Line and Norwegian cruise lines. They have set foot on almost every island in the Caribbean in so doing. Locally they have taught in OTOW, in the Sandpiper Resort and in downtown Clearwater. During the summer they teach in their home town of Ottawa, Ontario.

The adventures of Joanne and Geoff don't necessarily depend on their dancing habits. They love to explore. By car they have toured Europe and by ship they have toured the Greek Islands, Malta, Kusadasi, Istanbul and the Danube.

Their first cruise opportunity was on a Russian 25,000 ton cruise ship on the Saguenay River, Quebec and to St. Pierre and Miquelon, two tiny islands located just off the coast in Newfoundland, Canada.

A guest speaker on the cruise was the son of soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

When the ship returned to port, it was summarily repossessed for failure to pay port taxes. Not long after that, it mysteriously burned to the water line – a memorable start to their cruising life.

Now that Geoff and Joanne are getting a little older, they no longer venture as far, but that doesn't stop them from stepping out at Snowbirds Club line dancing on Thursday mornings or lighting up the floor at Canadian Club dances.

The love of dancing drew Joanne and Geoff together and it is what unites them still.